

Board of Education Agenda Item

Item: M.

Date: September 22, 2004

Topic: First Review of a Recommendation to Establish Proficiency Levels for the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Oral Proficiency Interview and the Writing Proficiency Test as Alternate Tests to the Modern Language Association (MLA) Proficiency Test for Teachers and Advanced Students

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Origin:

☐ Topic presented for information only (no board action required)

☒ Board review required by
☒ State or federal law or regulation
☐ Board of Education regulation
☐ Other: _____

☒ Action requested at this meeting ☐ Action requested at future meeting: _____ (date)

Previous Review/Action:

☐ No previous board review/action

☒ Previous review/action
date June 23, 2004
action The Board of Education approved the use of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Oral Proficiency Interview and the Writing Proficiency Test as alternate tests to the Modern Language Association (MLA) Proficiency Test for Teachers and Advanced Students.

Background Information:

The Licensure Regulations for School Personnel allow native speakers or candidates who have learned a foreign language without formal academic credit in a college or university to meet the foreign language endorsement requirements by achieving a composite score at or above the fiftieth percentile on the listening, speaking, reading, writing, civilization, and culture sections of the Modern Language Association (MLA) Proficiency Test for Teachers and Advanced Students, and earning a minimum of three semester hours of methods of teaching foreign languages at the elementary and secondary levels from an accredited college or university in the United States.

On June 23, 2004, the Board of Education approved the use of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Oral Proficiency Interview and the Writing Proficiency Test as alternate tests to the Modern Language Association (MLA) Proficiency Test for Teachers and Advanced Students.

The **ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI)** is a face-to-face or telephone interview between a certified ACTFL tester and examinee that determines how well a person speaks a language by comparing his or her performance of specific communication tasks with the criteria for each of 10 proficiency levels described in the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines-Speaking (Revised 1999)*. The **ACTFL Writing Proficiency Test (WPT)** is a vehicle that measures how well a person spontaneously writes in a language (without access to dictionaries or grammar references) by comparing his/her performance on specific writing tasks with the criteria stated in the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines – Writing (Revised 2001)* descriptions.

The following states are using official ACTFL testing in foreign languages for some component of their teacher certification/licensure process. These states have established a formal testing protocol with the ACTFL Testing Office for assessing teacher candidate speaking proficiency. The minimal level of proficiency is established by the individual state.

State	Test	Purpose	Minimal standard required
California	OPI*	BCLAD** Requirement: All teachers must demonstrate language ability in a language other than English	Novice High
Connecticut	OPI WPT***	All foreign languages	Intermediate High Intermediate High
Georgia	OPI	All languages – alternative teacher certification	Advanced Low
Maine	OPI	All languages – alternative teacher certification	Advanced Low
Maryland	OPI/WPT	Italian	Advanced Low/Advanced Low
New Jersey	OPI WPT	All languages – (OPI only) Bilingual and ESL Teachers-target language & English	Advanced Low Advanced Low
Pennsylvania	OPI	French, German, Spanish - all teachers – as an alternative to the Praxis	Intermediate High
Texas	OPI	All languages in which the TOPT*** is not available	Advanced Low

* OPI - ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview

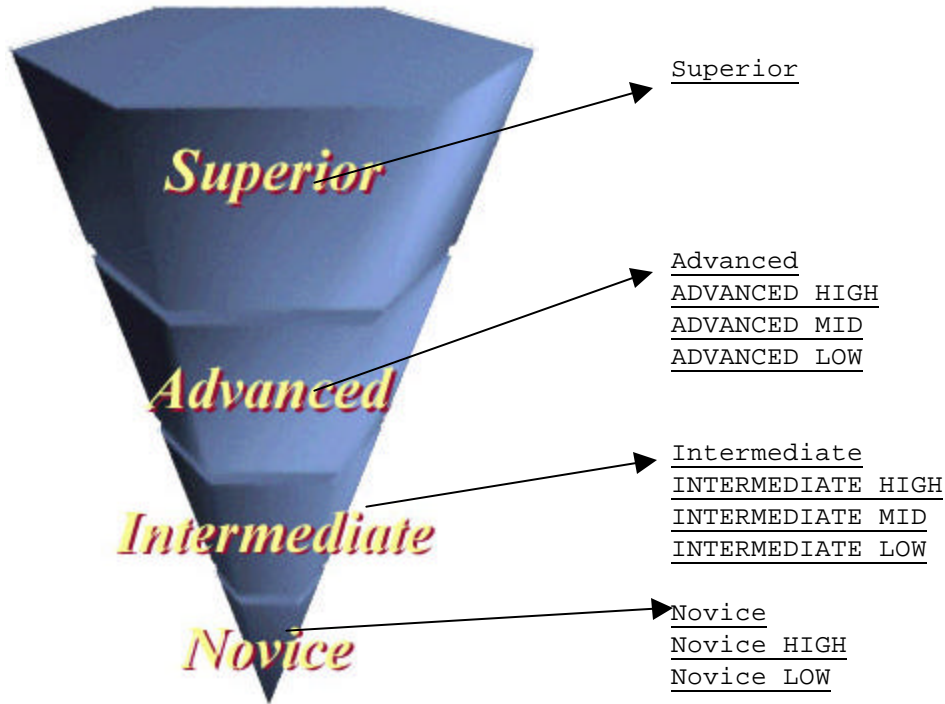
*** WPT - ACTFL Writing Proficiency Tests

** BCLAD - Bilingual, Crosscultural, Language and Academic Development (BCLAD)

****TOPT - Texas Oral Proficiency Test

ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES

The 10 proficiency levels that may be achieved by test takers are listed below:



[Excerpt from the Language Testing International Web Site]

Summary of Major Elements:

Licensed Virginia teaching practitioners were invited to participate in an ACTFL OPI and ACTFL WPT validation and standard-setting study to determine the validity of the assessments and minimum proficiency levels or cut scores on these assessments for this licensing provision. The validation and standard-setting study was held on Thursday, August 12, 2004, at the Doubletree-Airport Hotel in Richmond, Virginia. Twelve Virginia teaching practitioners with endorsements in Chinese, Japanese, German, French, Spanish, and Italian acted as Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) and participated in the full-day study. Two representatives from ACTFL, Dr. Elvira Swender and Helen Hamlyn, facilitated the validation and standard setting process. Two Department of Education representatives, Patty Pitts, director of licensure, and Faye Rollings-Carter, foreign language specialist, observed the study.

The study entailed giving the participants a formal half-day ACTFL OPI and WPT Familiarization, followed by a SME review of actual speech and writing samples in the target languages in the afternoon. During the ACTFL OPI and WPT Familiarization, the participants were instructed in the OPI and WPT rating scales - the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking and Writing - and the format of both assessments. The SMEs also were given other data to consider, especially when setting "cut scores." That information included the results of a

study evaluating the proficiency scores of foreign language majors; the minimum language proficiency levels recommended by NCATE (The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education); and other State Departments of Education that have adopted ACTFL assessments as a part of their teacher licensing requirements.

In the afternoon, the participating SMEs divided into language groups and listened to a range of taped OPIs and read a range of completed WPTs in their target language. (Two SMEs were able to participate in the review of writing samples in two languages.) The SMEs discussed the language samples among themselves, focusing their discussions on whether a speaker or writer at that level would be qualified to teach the expected grade and course levels in Virginia public schools. At the end of the afternoon, each SME was asked to give the facilitator his or her recommendation for a minimum proficiency.

The initial, individual recommendations were tabulated and presented to the group as follows:

ACTFL OPI minimum proficiency or “passing score”: 10 said Advanced Low and two said Intermediate High.

ACTFL WPT minimum proficiency or “passing score”: 10 said Advanced Low and four said Advanced Mid.

After the presentation of the initial individual recommendation, a discussion followed, at the conclusion of which the group was asked if they could all support a recommendation of Advanced Low as a minimum score in speaking and writing. All 12 Subject Matter Experts agreed that they could support that recommendation.

PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

The unanimous recommendations of the Subject Matter Experts at the conclusion of the meeting were as follows:

ACTFL OPI Result		ACTFL WPT Result	
Novice Low	Not Qualified	Novice Low	Not Qualified
Novice Mid	Not Qualified	Novice Mid	Not Qualified
Novice High	Not Qualified	Novice High	Not Qualified
Intermediate Low	Not Qualified	Intermediate Low	Not Qualified
Intermediate Mid	Not Qualified	Intermediate Mid	Not Qualified
Intermediate High	Not Qualified	Intermediate High	Not Qualified
Advanced Low	Qualified	Advanced Low	Qualified
Advanced Mid	Qualified	Advanced Mid	Qualified
Advanced High	Qualified	Advanced High	Qualified
Superior	Qualified	Superior	Qualified

Superintendent's Recommendation:

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education waive first review and approve the Advisory Board on Teacher Education and Licensure's proposed proficiency levels of "Advanced Low" and above for the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and the Writing Proficiency Test (WPT).

Impact on Resources: The cost of the tests would be incurred by the test taker.

Timetable for Further Review/Action: N/A